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ABSTRACT

This report discusses two teachers' conferences jointly financed by the Michigan Speech Association and the Michigan Education Association. The teachers discussed how speech and dramatic performances translate into terminal behaviors, how group tasks can be adapted to individual accountability, how to communicate achievement to students, and how to communicate achievement to administrators and parents. The conferences decided that it is impossible to measure adequately a teacher's performance, with a single set of behavioral objectives. They also provided a list of specific ways in which achievement in speech and drama can be communicated to students, parents, and administrators. (AA)

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SPECIAL REPORT

ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE SPEECH ARTS

Michigan Speech Association
Accountability Project

Sponsored by
Michigan Speech Association
Council on State Organizations
of the
Michigan Education Association

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Two commonly held viewpoints about accountability conflict about the nature of responsibility. One perspective is to hold the teacher responsible for meeting a single set of behavioral objectives; another perspective evaluates the choices of the teacher in communicating student achievement to the student and others. Therefore, the Michigan Speech Association sponsored two workshops of teachers to discuss these perspectives about accountability.

These conferences in Mt. Pleasant and Detroit were jointly financed by MSA and the Michigan Education Association's Council on State Organizations. The results of these discussions are shared with other teachers in order to establish (1) the impossibility of adequately measuring a teacher's performance by a single set of behavioral objectives, and (2) a variety of ways that teachers can undertake their responsibility to communicate to others the achievement of individuals engaged in the teaching/learning act. To reach these conclusions the teachers spent their respective days discussing: (1) how do speech and dramatic performances translate into terminal behaviors, (2) how are group tasks adapted to individual accountability, (3) how is achievement communicated to students, and (4) how is achievement communicated to administrators and parents.

A major concern of the participants was the difficulty in accepting a single set of behavioral objectives as a standard for evaluating teacher performance. The subject matter difficulty arises from the nature of performance and the individual undertaking many speech behaviors as a member of a group. Thus, the speech arts teacher needs to communicate the performance and group aspects about speech arts in any discussion of accountability via a single set of behavioral objectives. At the same time, many teachers are making many responsible program choices in teaching but are not communicating the subsequent student achievement to parents, administrators and students.

One thrust of accountability is to hold the teacher solely responsible for achievement. Such a position does not include the other components of the educational system -- students, school administrators, parents, school boards, taxpayers, and legislators. The teacher must consider the inputs of others and the degree to which these other components share the responsibility for educational decision making. For example, a teacher with a class of 35 students for public speaking should not be compared to another teacher with only 12 students.

The following practices and rationales are not to be considered as an exhaustive treatment, but only a starting place for professional growth.

I. PERFORMANCE AS A TERMINAL BEHAVIOR

Because performance is an essential part of the speech arts, any consideration of terminal behavior has to describe performance. Enabling behaviors have their place, but must not be dominant in determining accountability. At the same time, performance may function as both a terminal and an enabling objective. For example, the process of theatre is to many a way of arriving at a quality of experience. Thus, the "finished performance" may reach definable standards, yet those behaviors in and of themselves exist as processes to apply to future instances. The actor will not perform as Hamlet again, but he has gained insight into the thinking of Hamlet as well as the many skills necessary to portray that role. Thus, the speech arts teacher needs to balance any statement of objectives as to their function as a terminal and enabling objective as well as the concern for performance as both a product and a process.

Performance requires that all three domains -- cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor -- are involved. The performance demands all three to be integrated in order to interact. In writing objectives the teacher must identify the domain of the content and the process with which these skills become the terminal

behavior. For example, the cognitive recognition of an argument by analogy may be enhanced in refutation by use of gestures, but the concern is in the attitudes towards the limitations of the argument by analogy. The debate coach wants the debator to recognize those forms of arguments in debate later in the season as well as later in life. Thus, the teacher faced with choosing objectives must see how the terminal objectives is both part of a whole and a whole at the same time. Thus, the teacher must also seek to define the time frame for the objective.

The very nature of communication as a process creates some confusion as to focus. A product terminal behavior requires concern for process enabling objectives. A group discussion necessitates a distinction between coming together as individuals and a gathering as a group. The teacher evaluates the individual as an individual even though the concern may be for the group accepting responsibility for its decision as a group. Therefore, many objectives of group discussion or a theatre production may only be enabling objectives of a <u>part</u> of the <u>total</u> group effort. Because of the nature of the direction of that group effort, the individual may only be able to do some of the objectives required of the total performance, i.e., the sound technician coordinates sound but does not achieve any of the acting objectives.

Another concern of communication is its place in the school curriculum. Many objectives should develop their accountability within a particular system by relating to those objectives which are terminal behaviors in the speech arts but only an enabling objective of another field. For example, the oral interpretation of literature to the speech arts teacher is a terminal performance in the speech class, but an enabling objective to the literature teacher. Or the demonstration speech for public speaking class is only a process for the chemistry teacher. Yet, these communication performances are necessary skills in other classes.

What performances are expected need to be specified by others in the system. Thus, accountability requires that inputs from other teachers, school administrators and the community occur before the teacher is held responsible for training students in those desired performances. Also, the students efforts toward achievement of the performance need to be considered.

II. INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN GROUP INTERACTION

Because the communication process is frequently a reaction to an audience, or another person, or a group, student learning not only considers message construction, but also the appropriate conditions for the response. Objectives to cover all situations are impossible to write or to measure. Shared leadership in a small group requires certain functions, not that everyone demonstrates each function. To set the objectives so that each person demonstrates each objective, requires either a move to only a few objectives or a structure that restricts the natural group functions.

In a reader's theatre production one reader might have 120 opportunities to demonstrate rapid speech with correct articulation while another reader may have only one chance. Thus, the usual percentage of correct performances loses its meaning under the performance expectations of this group task. Therefore, the nature of the group demands changes in the way objectives need to be written. This impact may invalidate the use of the objective or the way the achievement of the task is measured.

The important concern for the speech arts teacher is to note the impact group work has on the individual and the selection of terminal behaviors. The group process should not be sacrificed for individual measurement opportunities in order to achieve accountability.

III. COMMUNICATING ACHIEVEMENT TO STUDENTS

The value of any assignment, activity, or performance is reinforced when the student receives feedback reflecting task accomplishment. Feedback should be a measure of how well the student attained stated goals. In courses that are based upon the acquisition of certain cognitive skills, (mathematics, chemistry, etc.), the response mechanisms can be relatively simple and direct: Objectively assigned points, percentages, letter grades, and/or awards. However, the complexity and pervasiveness of affective goals in the speech classroom cloud the assessment of grades and make these feedback mechanisms inadequate in their frequency and scope.

The complexity of actions required to accomplish a single performance requires a more open-ended, flexible evaluative tool, that can more appropriately reflect progress on specific facets of the assignment. The evaluative tool, then, becomes an accountability device in itself, as it represents a progress report on particular desired behaviors in the classroom. Particularly complex is a response to a student's achievement in a group, where one's own performance is interdependent on the performances of others. The attainment of goals that require a variety of interrelated behaviors requires a variety of feedback mechanisms. Two major sources of feedback for student performance exist in the classroom: teacher and peers. Mechanisms are available to maximize the response potential of both.

1. Letter Grade. Students have come to rely upon such a measure, administrators usually require this arbitrary data for standardization of school records, college admission requirements, etc. Grades do represent one means of communicating student achievement. They need not be the only means.

2. Critique Sheets. The critique sheet is an accountability tool as it indicates student attainment of established objectives. A series of critique sheets can be collected in a notebook or folder to establish a semester-long progress report on each student.

3. Anecdotal Records. A continuous commentary on student progress can be retained on notecards or in file folders. Since a method might include dated entries regarding specific student performances, or perceived progress of the student towards certain affective goals of the speech arts. Such a tool may be especially effective when observing student participation in group-centered activities or cooperative ventures.

4. Oral Comments. The most immediate means of communicating achievement to students is through oral response following an assignment. The instructor should recognize success and indicate areas for improvement in future performances. Comments adapt to the "now" of the individual and the specific performance.

5. Ballots. Both debate ballots and forensic critique sheets indicate the proficiency with which the student has mastered the appropriate skills. Such instruments are valuable feedback mechanisms, but can also be compiled into a running progress report on the achievements of the participants. By retaining these ballots in a program file, one builds a record of program achievement over time.

6. Special Recognitions. (certificates, awards, honors) Special recognitions are frequently made in honors assemblies, or for participants in co-curricular activities. Certificates and trophies or pins for achievement are among the most common awards, although some schools are now offering letters (similar to athletic emblems) for debate, forensics and drama. Such awards do recognize outstanding achievements, hopefully without minimizing the successes of those who do not receive such a prize.

7. Class File. Each student can accumulate his own collection of papers, evaluation forms, journals and other assignments for the speech class. Such a file encouragea a personal accountability for each student.

8. "Responsibility Pairs". Each student is assigned a partner in class with whom to work, study and practice in a reciprocal responsibility relationship. Each partner is responsible for seeing that his partner completes his assignments (i.e., achieves class goals).

9. Peer Feedback. Written and oral comments from fellow class members, using instruments very similar to that of the instructor provide a one-to-one feedback system that can communicate successes and improvements to students.

10. Humorous Awards. For each class, based upon a ballot selection by peers can be a very refreshing, yet meaningful means of indicating achievement to the students.

11. Speaker's Bureau. Participation in a speaker exchange program, whether by election, appointment or volunteer can communicate to the student that he has mastered certain skills which permit him to further polish his performance and receive a variety of experiences.

12. Audience Shift Mechanisms. In a public speaking context, such techniques provide immediate response to the student's effectiveness.

13. Classroom Anthologies. A collection of quality speeches, outlines or papers recognizes and reinforces good work. Similarly, a class version of "Bartlett's Quotations" citing especially well phrased thoughts can immortalize a students achievement.

14. Performances of Class Productions. Such presentations for other classes and/or parents and public can create an avenue for both individual and "individual-as-a-functioning-group member" recognition.

15. Newspaper Releases. Newspaper coverage by either the school paper or the local paper (or both) of speech performances provides a more public recognition. The school paper may wish to report on speeches or performances given in class.

16. Speech Journal. Another potential avenue for evaluation is self-evaluation. The accumulation of personal responses to assessment of his own progress. The journal can also be an intra-personal, reflection tool, providing insight for both teacher and student (especially valuable in considering affective growth).

17. Video and Audio Tape Recordings. The employment of taping devices allows the student to view and evaluate his own performance, as well as allowing the instructor the opportunity to re-evaluate and discuss the student's performance with him.

One idea was clearly reflected in the contributions of the teachers attending the conference; while grades are perhaps the most universal method of communicating achievement to students, they are certainly not the only way, nor are they the most effective.

IV. COMMUNICATING ACHIEVEMENT TO PARENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS

The Goals of Education in Michigan state, "Michigan Education must develop effective means for involving parents in the educational development of their children and encouraging them to meet their responsibilities in this regard."

The process of education is a continuous one; it is not restricted to the cement block confines of the school building; nor is it time-bound in an 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. framework. Life at school and life at home should be cooperative learning environments; not mutually exclusive or completely distinct ones. Much of the responsibility for initiating this involvement and providing avenues of

parental input rest with the teacher in the school. The tremendous potential for student reinforcement and encouragement from parental interaction represents a strong justification for parent-oriented policies and actions by school personnel. However, as tax-paying citizens, parents also have a right first of all, to know what is happening at the school, particularly as it affects their own children and secondly, to be an active participant in the learning environment of their children. As speech educators we need to establish that crucial communication link with parents on two levels: first, sharing of information about the student's achievement, and secondly, providing opportunities for parental involvement in both curricular and co-curricular projects.

The channels available to teachers in communicating with parents seem to fall into two categories. The first is in the form of direct teacher-parent contact. Most often, these contacts are intended to communicate data about the student's achievement to his parents. A more indirect communication channel for transmitting information about class activities and accomplishments utilizes a more public communication setting in which parents may learn not only of their own child's achievements, but also those of fellow classmates, teammates, cast and crew members.

In communicating student achievement to parents, several methods are available:

1. The report card is the most obvious and most frequently used method, usually indicating a letter grade.

2. Telephone calls and letters are more personal and more information-specific modes, and can indicate both successes and difficulties to parents.

3. Regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences and school open houses provide opportunities for face-to-face interaction.

4. A compiled packet of evaluation forms requiring a parental signature upon return not only initiates the teacher-to-parent contact, but assures a parent-to-teacher feedback link.

5. Home visits are yet another direct means of establishing contact.

6. Any informal contact that occurs in the community, whether at church or grocery store, links the teacher and parents.

Parental involvement in both curricular and co-curricular activities can be encouraged in several ways.

1. Assignments that require parent-child interaction, such as parent/student interviews and home activities or observations allow the student to share what is learned with his family. For example, students might be asked to diagram their dining room table as a study in spatial variables, relationships and interaction patterns. Or they might interview their parents about "Ten Things I Did for Recreation as a Teenager" as a values development/clarification activity.

2. Attendance at plays provides a setting for teacher-parent interaction.

3. Exhibition debates, Forensic Team presentations, "Speech Night", and special preview performances give parents an opportunity to observe first-hand what the student has been able to achieve.

4. Potlucks for parents and Awards Banquets provide an arena for parental involvement and student recognition.

5. Having the students do scenes for a special parent's night for only the parents of the student involved gives a special recognition to those parents and students.

6. The multitudinous preparations for a dramatic production provide countless opportunities for those parents who wish to do more than observe. Some schools even create awards for parental achievement in speech activities.

Yet another way of communicating is through the community.

1. Press releases (especially those with pictures) provide exposure for student accomplishments and school programs.

2. A speaker's bureau for local service clubs and organizations can demonstrate student skills to the area townspeople, as well as providing an avenue for community (parents) participation in the school curriculum.

The necessity for communicating student achievement to parents is clear. The parent is a very prominent member of the "education team." He has both an obligation and a right to be informed about his child's progress. From an accountability perspective, the parent needs some demonstration of the learning that results from

participation in the speech arts. The transmission of this information by the teacher becomes an ingenious blend of accountability concerns and public relations. However, if only the report card is the basis of accountability, then the teacher is performing his responsibilities to both parent and student at a minimum level. Depending upon the situation, some of these other methods must be utilized.

Administrators tend to receive information from three channels: (a) bureaucratic records, i.e., attendance reports, (b) hallway rhetoric or downtown gossip, and (c) crisis appeals requiring a decision, whether a discipline problem or extra money needed for a state tournament. Since these channels do not accurately reflect performance achievement, the conferees suggest:

1. Presentation of performances at opening teachers meetings.
2. Programs at schools that include principal and superintendent.
3. If folders are kept, copies of three different ones filed at the end of the year in the central office.
4. Hand written invitations to each administrator for any public performance.
5. Have administrators serve as judges/evaluators for in-class tournaments or festivals.
6. Do a mini-debate at a public meeting before the school board.
7. Invite administrators to a Forensic Night for parents and school board members.
8. Ask principal to inspect class files on projects undertaken.
9. An annual written report on all co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
10. Keep records of all written correspondence to parents and then ask principal to read and respond.
11. Use self-analysis sheets as a record of achievement, then ask principal to read a set sample (10%) to gain understanding of non-graded feedback.
12. Keep a spiral notebook with a page on each person for anecdotal material; ask principal to read.

13. Ask principal and/or superintendent to accompany or visit your participants at a tournament/festival at another school.

14. Send each administrator a set of critique forms used during the year.

15. Performances (a scene, readings, debates, speeches, symposium) at P.T.A.

16. Video tape performances at beginning of semester and then again at the end; play to administrators at a special showing.

The application of accountability requirements to the speech arts presents a challenge for the teacher. Most teachers possess the tools to demonstrate achievement of desired objectives. The responsibility now rests with the Speech Educator to establish adequate justification for student learning. Four suggestions seem appropriate: (1) Recognize techniques already being used that do serve as measures of student progress, and analyze who receives most of this information and who should be receiving it. (2) Encourage development of new and alternative methods that will communicate to student, parent, administrator and other faculty. (3) Work at establishing appropriate objectives, identifying objectives in all three of the domains, the skills to be measured and how it will be measured and (4) Avoid being restricted to one measuring tool -- strive for a variety of available alternatives. The concept of accountability is not alien to the speech arts -- we possess the tools. We need only to maximize their effectiveness from the reality of the perspective of Speech and Drama.